

**Commission on Aging  
Health and Wellness Committee Meeting  
September 5, 2023 (9:30-11:00 via Zoom)**

**Meeting Summary**

Attending: Virginia Cain, Betsy Carrier, Joyce Dubow, David Engel, Mona Negm, Laurie Prose, Marcia Pruzan, Marsha Weber. Staff: Tina Purser Langley, Josi Makon

**Welcome, Introductions**

**General Updates:**

- Tina reported that 2500 copies of all pieces of the Life Transitions documents are now printed, including COA business cards that will be inserted; plans were made to begin stuffing the folders on September 13, 9 AM, Hungerford Office Building.
  - The packages will be needed for the October Summit on Aging, David's meeting with a military veterans' group, and Active Aging Week.
  - It will be important to limit distribution at the Summit to one per person; Marcia suggested having a notice at the distribution table stating that additional copies are available for download on the COA website (with URL).
- The COA is awaiting response to a letter to HHS Director, Dr. Bridgers asking about the vaccination plan for older adults this fall. [Maryland Matters daily newsletter published a recent article](#) about timing, cost, and implementation plans for vaccination throughout the state.
- New officers will be needed for the incoming executive committee and committee chairs and cochairs. Both chair and co-chairs will be needed for H&W, as Marsha Weber will be cycling off of the COA at the end of this year, and Marcia Pruzan is holding a temporary co-chair position until a new COA co-chair can be named.

**Presentation:** Josi Makon, Adult Behavioral Health Coordinator.

This office conducts consultations for older adults and adults with disabilities, monitors outreach contracts for behavioral health services for older adults, and provides technical assistance for nursing homes. Scope of work includes:

- Access to behavioral health for uninsured low income
- Access to services through the Aging and Disability Resource Unit
- Friendly Visitor Program—covid has really affected isolation—friendship and support or isolated older adults. Provides access to resources in community to assure healthy and safe environment as possible.
- Oversee program to encourage active rewarding lives (PEARLS) for 60+ experiencing mild depressive symptoms.
- Oversees 988 hotline with 24/7 staff and volunteers; this program is growing nationally, and in Maryland is run by EveryMind.

In response to questions, Josi made the following points:

- Staffing: Therapy is provided by both psychiatrists and social workers. There is not enough staffing to meet needs, to hire and retain staff; this leads to high turnover and long wait list for services. With the rapid aging of the population, even those who are leading active, productive lives may still have mental health issues, social support needs.
- Some services now are being offered virtually, and Medicaid is covering telehealth now.
- In response to members' requests, Josi said she would try to obtain data on volume of services, wait list times, information on homeless, veterans, age limits for services, etc., along with data from the Crisis Center.
- Adults of any age (18+) may qualify for behavioral health services, and there are no income requirements or insurance coverage needs for most of these services. (Medicare does not cover mental health services)

One way in which the COA could support this work pertains to the major push to establish behavioral health assisted living facilities across the state, where residents are expected to manage their own activities of daily living with dignity and mental health support. There are a few in Anne Arundel, Baltimore City, Cecil County, St. Mary's County, and are desperately needed here. This county has the largest need with fewest resources. The COA could support setting up these programs (via contractors) here. "Cornerstone" still exists, but does not have inpatient capability.

Tina will ask Josi for her slides and requested data.

(See slides for additional detail.)

**October 2023 meeting:**

- Mona Negm will report on her upcoming roundtable on mental health
- Following receipt of data from Josi, this group can focus on potential issues for both education/action and advocacy. Some might include a broader look at assisted living in the County as part of the long-term care issue.

Next Meeting: October 2, 2023 9:30-11:00AM